

Inner Renewal Leads to New Outward Practice

Ezekiel 36:26

1/11/26

Who wants to live well? Who wants to be happy? Who wants not to be bored? Who wants to be more available to God?

I had the privilege of leading our afterschool ministry for middle school students on Tuesday and during the devotion the idea of boredom came up. Not because I was leading of course. Who causes boredom? I would expect most people to say, “The teacher is boring. The game is boring. And it’s causing me to be bored.” That can all be true, but it takes away our power. Jesus taught me very early in my life that I control being bored. Does the universe affect me, or do I affect the universe? God wants to give us this new heart, this new perspective, this new mindset. Jesus lives for our inner renewal to lead to new outward practice.

To start the Big 26, we are going to talk about becoming more available to God in the next 3 weeks. Beginning the new year is often about beginning new routines and changing habits. However, many people can change portfolios, homes, or routines without ever experiencing inner renewal. God’s promise is not just upgraded lifestyles, but transformed hearts.

You will not live well, nor be happy, always bored if you don’t pursue a transformed heart.

Ezekiel prophesies between 593-571BC in Babylon. Israel at this time is in a bad place. Babylon invades and deports Ezekiel and others to Babylon in 597BC. Ezekiel’s task from God was to inform Israel that it was God that sent Babylon because of Israel’s faithlessness. According to Ezekiel, the only way to live well, the only way to be happy, the only way not to be bored is to be available to God. And we don’t have to do this alone. In fact, if we are open to it, God promises to give us a new heart! To give us God’s own Holy Spirit to change us from the inside out. Whatever, the outward resolution, begin by asking for inner renewal.

This promise continues and is fulfilled through Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Success does not graduate us from spiritual renewal. New beginnings are not a one-time conversion moment, but an ongoing identity in Christ.

Between Christmas and New Year’s, I read portions of Soren Kierkegaard’s *Training in Christianity*. Part of the title comes from his point that he was in the process of training to be Christian. Not fully Christian. We had officer training yesterday and God has very high expectations on how we are to act in the world. But we will never achieve these expectations if we believe Jesus is someone or something that happened 2026 years ago. We must train with Jesus in the present. Live and make decisions with Jesus by our side in the Big 26. Written in

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1849, Kierkegaard could have influenced the saying, “What would Jesus do?” but he would correct us and say, “What is Jesus doing?” Jesus is not something or someone who happened 2026 years ago. Jesus is alive and desires to live in us and with us. Christians must live with Jesus as a contemporary. To speak about Jesus in the past tense is not understanding nor feeling the power of Jesus Christ, pursuing inner renewal, pursuing friendship.

I hope that you have had a powerful spiritual experience, but if you have or haven’t, to be Christian is practicing the faith of Jesus, to live with Jesus in the Big 26! Not what would Jesus do, but what is Jesus doing with and through us. Success does not graduate us from spiritual renewal. New beginnings are not a one-time conversion moment, but an ongoing identity in Christ.

Remember the mountain top experience that Peter, James and John have with Jesus (Matthew 17:1-9). The four of them climb a mountain to worship and God, Moses, and Elijah show up. Peter is in awe and wants to make houses to stay on that mountain top. Jesus affirms that the mountain top experience is good, they have achieved success, but success does not graduate us from spiritual renewal. New beginnings are not a one-time conversion moment, but an ongoing identity in Christ. Success for Jesus is down in the valley. Success for Jesus is picking up the cross. Success for Jesus is inner renewal. The inner renewal will get you closer to the best things in life, which are friendships.

Success does not graduate us from spiritual renewal. New beginnings are not a one-time conversion moment, but an ongoing identity in Christ. I appreciate the story of Zaccheus in Luke 19:1-10. Zaccheus is a wildly successful tax-collector but most relationships are broken. He has all the money that he can spend and yet he lacks spiritual renewal. His lifestyle is upgraded as you can get, but his soul searches for more, something better and deeper and he hears about this Jesus. He seeks out Jesus and climbs a tree to see Jesus because he is short. Jesus notices the small in stature and the small in character. Jesus invites Himself to have dinner at Zaccheus’ house. Jesus wants invited to live in you. Once Zaccheus accepts the invitation his spiritual renewal begins and he promises to live a life of generosity, giving half of his possessions to the poor and to repay those he cheated fourfold! If you are materially successful, how are you joining Jesus’ ministry of generosity? Success does not graduate us from spiritual renewal. New beginnings are not a one-time conversion moment, but an ongoing identity in Christ. Zaccheus’ begins his inner renewal to lead to new outward practice. I guarantee his relationships will deepen.

Finally, God wants new beginnings of the heart to respond to new circumstances. I don’t know if you have noticed but the world is changing rapidly. Jesus’ faith helps us to respond to a rapidly changing world with resilience and kindness. We must look inwardly to accurately see and respond to the external world. The world needs us right now to point to Jesus Christ and to be the moral compass, but it takes us taking our own inventory of our souls.

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Whatever, resolution we have made for this year, strive first for Jesus, becoming more available to God to root your resolution in the faith of Jesus Christ. Your resolution will not be as good as it can be without inner renewal.

Love,
Pastor Curtis

January 2026 Sermon Theme: Strive first for Jesus, Becoming more Available to God

Sermon Notes:

1. Many people can change portfolios, homes, or routines without ever experiencing inner renewal. God's promise is not just upgraded lifestyles, but transformed hearts.
2. Success does not graduate us from spiritual renewal. New beginnings are not a one-time conversion moment, but an ongoing identity in Christ.
3. God wants new beginnings of the heart to respond to new circumstances.